

RHETORIC AND RATIONALITY

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ABSTRACT: The dominance of a purist, ‘scientific’ form of reason since the Enlightenment has eclipsed and produced multiple misunderstandings of the nature, role of and importance of the millennia-old art of rhetoric. For centuries the multiple perspectives conveyed by rhetoric were always the counterbalance to hubristic claims of certainty. As such rhetoric was taught as one of the three essential components of the ‘trivium’ – rhetoric, dialectic and grammar; i.e. persuasive communication, logical reasoning and the codification of discourse. These three disciplines were the legs of the three legged stool on which western civilisation still rests despite the perversion and muddling of the first of these three. This essay explains how the evisceration of rhetoric both as practice and as critical theory and the consequent over-reliance on a virtual cult of rationality has impoverished philosophy and has dangerously dimmed understandings of the human condition.

KEYWORDS; Rhetoric; Dialectic; Rationality; Enlightenment; Philosophy; Communication; C.S.Peirce; Max Horkheimer; Theodor Adorno; Jürgen Habermas; John Deely

THE PROBLEM

There are many criticisms of the rationalist themes and approaches which burgeoned during and since the Enlightenment. This paper enlists Max Horkheimer (1895 – 1973) and Theodor Adorno (1903 – 1969), John Deely (1942 –) and Charles Sanders Peirce (1839 – 1914), along with some leading Enlightenment figures themselves in order to mount a critique of the fate of the millennia-old art of rhetoric during that revolution in ways of thinking. The argument will be that post-Enlightenment over-emphasis on what might variously be called dialectic, logic or reason (narrowly understood) has dulled understanding of what people are and how people think. There have been two serious consequences of this mistake. Firstly philosophers have been circumvented and have lost potency because of their over-reliance on logic as *the* way of guiding human affairs. Secondly charlatans have invaded what was hitherto

the quasi-sacred and much more prestigious space of persuasive communication. This space was sacred and prestigious when it was under the control of the church and other moralists. From the nineteenth century onward paralysis in thinking about the crucial role of the rhetorical-dialectical nexus has enabled philistines and the mendacious to capture and exploit this poorly understood realm of ideological and cultural production. This paper argues that putatively democratic countries now operate with a lobotomised intelligence where it comes to understanding and confronting the ways persuasive communication controls political and social construction. It calls for the aesthetes of science and logical reason to reverse their antiquated, modernist, rejection of the realm of rhetoric. If intellectuals do not sufficiently grasp the notion of what rhetoric is they will be doomed to increasing marginalisation in a contemporary world where rhetoric dominates.

RHETORIC AND ITS REJECTION

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) has a good summary of what rhetoric is and its importance in his: *The Advancement of Learning*:

...the duty and office of rhetoric is to apply reason to imagination for the better moving of the will. For we see reason is disturbed in the administration thereof by three means--by illaqueation or sophism, which pertains to logic; by imagination or impression, which pertains to rhetoric; and by passion or affection, which pertains to morality. And as in negotiation with others, men are wrought by cunning, by importunity, and by vehemency; so in this negotiation within ourselves, men are undermined by inconsequences, solicited and importuned by impressions or observations, and transported by passions. Neither is the nature of man so unfortunately built, as that those powers and arts should have force to disturb reason, and not to establish and advance it. For the end of logic is to teach a form of argument to secure reason, and not to entrap it; the end of morality is to procure the affections to obey reason, and not to invade it; the end of rhetoric is to fill the imagination to second reason, and not to oppress it; for these abuses of arts come in but ex oblique, for caution.¹

In other words morality and the ways facts are presented have a major role in shaping thought. Thought is not formed by logic alone.

For Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679):

Rhetorick is an Art consisting not only in moving the Passions of the Judge; but chiefly in Proofs. And that this Art is Profitable...It consisteth therefore chiefly in

¹ Francis Bacon, *The Advancement of Learning*, retrieved 25 February, 2013, from website: <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/5500/pg5500.txt>, 2004.

Proofs; which are *Inferences*: and all *Inferences* being *Syllogismes*, a *Logician*, if he would observe the difference between a plain *Syllogisme*, and an *Enthymeme*, (which is a *Rhetoricall Syllogisme*,) would make the best Rhetorician. For all *Syllogismes* and *Inferences* belong properly to *Logick*; whether they infer truth or probability: and because without this *Art* it would often come to pass, that evil men by the advantage of natural abilities, would carry an evil cause against a good; it brings with it at least this profit, that making the pleaders even in skill, it leaves the odds only in the merit of the cause. Besides, ordinarily those that are Judges, are neither patient, nor capable of long *Scientificall proofs*, drawn from the *principles* through many *Syllogismes*; and therefore had need to be instructed by the *Rhetoricall*, and shorter way.²

A plain syllogism is the attempt to arrive at irrefutable conclusions by the logical progression of statements of apparently clear facts. An enthymeme is reasoning where one of the statements presumes and relies on prior understandings in the audience and thus is vulnerable to charges that it is not irrefutable. What Hobbes is essentially saying is that people do not usually base their understanding on lengthy, perfect explanation. We may presume that we think rationally. But most of the time we operate in terms of the multiple assumptions in the discourses which are the foundations of our culture. By *discourses* here we mean mental constructions which are formed and expressed by language and other cultural forms. In practical terms, when thinking about something we nearly always have no option but to think in shortcuts. We interrogate our largely culturally formed ways of perceiving in order to mentally seize onto the most expeditious depiction of what seems to be the case. That is we reason as reasoning is commonly understood *enthymematically* rather than *syllogistically*. On a day to day basis we do not reason as if we were in a scientific or social scientific laboratory³. Instead in colloquial terms we reason by making reasonable assumptions. Nobody is equipped or has time to always seek ultimate scientific truths about everything we encounter every day, about everything we think every day, about everything we do every day.

Hobbes is saying that for this reason it would be a mistake to presume we or others privilege what are in fact impractical levels of attaining the ultimate unassailable scientific truth. The rhetorical wisdom of his period understood that people operate at the enthymematic level. The enthymematic level is that aspect of the operation of culture which involves the rhetorical – which involves the ways things are ‘put’. This enthymematic/rhetorical aspect of human communication is no

² Thomas Hobbes, *A Brief of the Art of Rhetoric*, retrieved 25 February, 2013 from ‘Classic rhetoric and persuasion’ website: <http://www.classicpersuasion.org/pw/hobbes/index.htm>, 2013.

³ See discussion on ideoscopy and cenoscopy below.

different today. However scientism has ordained that the bulk of us ordinary folk neglect to equip ourselves with a full understanding of, or significant skills in, the operation of rhetoric. This field has been vacated to the instrumentally motivated specialists in: psychology and social psychology, organisational communication, psephology, public relations, public affairs, media advice, opinion editorial production, corporate communication, think tanks, advertising, market research, opinion research, customer relations, event management and so on. This intellectual vacation of the field of rhetoric, this leaving it to the experts, involves a lulling, a scientific lullaby which has left this powerful art in how thinking and thus how culture is formed vulnerable to manipulation by the mendacious, the stupid, the downright evil.

Another Enlightenment figure Etienne Bonnot de Condillac (1715-1780) can also be quoted to challenge too exaggerated a reliance on rationalism when the human condition in fact requires another dimension to how we make up our minds. Condillac stresses the way people's thought is influenced by their passions and *affect* in addition to cold logic. Condillac writes:

The influence of the passions is so great that without it the understanding is virtually at a standstill, so much so that for lack of passions there is barely any intellect left. For certain talents they are even absolutely necessary.⁴

For instance killing an animal for food cannot just be conceived by those who we would count as human in a purely logical manner and killing animals for fun even less so. Hopefully most of us have sentiments and affections which steer our rationalisation about whether or how either sorts of killing should be done. Similarly how refugees or disaster-hit people are aided is surely not decided on a so called 'rational' basis alone? As another example thinking about climate change, including the fate of future generations starting with lowland island dwellers can surely not be judged simply on purely 'rational' grounds? Purely 'rational' grounds might include the reasoning for instance: Unaided victims might be involved in mass migration and political instability; the economic output of their regions will decrease; and so on. But isn't there a different dimension to our thought which *irrationally* (that is, not by cold logic) tells us people just should not be left to die? Reason as the term is commonly used might militate that workers have adequate wages and health and safety conditions. Better working conditions might increase productivity. But does instrumental reason alone stipulate that families should not have loved ones maimed or killed on factory machines? Does this sort of logic stipulated that women should or should not get left

⁴ Etienne de Condillac, *Essay on the Origin of Human Knowledge*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 69.

behind in career progression? On the more positive side: Do people better themselves at work, in terms of education, or in their community generally for purely rational reasons to do with tangible reward? Doesn't affect spur people on? Do not feelings of self-worth, pride, curiosity, ambition, or in some instances unfortunately fear or greed have a lot to do with this so called rationality? Emotional appeal is represented by 'pathos' in the trilogy: ethos, logos and pathos – character, logic and emotion. Ethos logos and pathos are described in Aristotle's analysis of rhetoric in his still useful handbook: *The Art of Rhetoric* or *Rhetoric*. In that book Aristotle suggests how to play on the above kinds of human sentiments. He shows them as components of an aspect which cannot be, or at least which should not be, sundered from reasoning if one is going to genuinely understand what it is to reason as humans are generally thought of as reasoning. That aspect to do with how humans reason he calls rhetoric.

Despite the above acknowledgement of the ways the rhetorical dimension shapes thinking a tendency to eclipse the usefulness and prestige of rhetoric had already begun before the above Enlightenment authorities were born. A major opponent of rhetoric was Peter Ramus (1515 – 1572). As Walter Ong (1912 – 2003) explains:

Dialectic and rhetoric have been intertwined at least from the time of the Greek Sophists till our present day, and when Ramus decrees that they must be disengaged from one another...he engages some of the most powerful and obscure forces in intellectual history.⁵

Ong explains that the Ramist tendency stripped substance from the scholarship and the practice of rhetoric. The pre-Ramist rhetorical curriculum which Bacon, Hobbes and Condillac would have recognised understood rhetoric to include:

Inventio: Invention or discovery of innovative expression – that is the manufacture, the creation of discourse. This is tantamount to the production of culture and thus the facilitation of ways in which it is possible to think.

Dispositio: Disposition, that is judgement about the arrangement of elements of the discourse so that it has the most, or certain types of discursive meaning and effect.

Elocutio: Style of persuasion e.g. argumentative, emotive, or poetic.

Pronuntiatio: Oratorical delivery – performance in terms of voice and gesture. Like *elocutio*, *pronuntiatio* contextualises how the invented and arranged discourse is emitted and received. These latter two elements thus contribute to the discourse. They play a part in how the mind is invited to think.

⁵ Walter Ong, *Ramus, Method and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004, p. 270.

Memoria: Memory including understanding how memories dim and how they can be rekindled as well as mnemonic devices. This element is to do with the art or science of how to *play* on people's memories.

Ong 2002 (p. 4) argues that Ramus, distorted the work of Cicero (106-43 BCE) as well as Renaissance humanist Rudolph Agricola (1444 - 1485) and others to privilege dialectic or logical reasoning over rhetoric. Aristotle (circa 384 - 322 BCE) had previously decreed them 'counterparts' to the conveyance of understanding:

Rhetoric is the counterpart of dialectic...all men engage in them both after a fashion. For all men attempt in some measure to conduct investigations and to furnish explanations...⁶

Ong tells the story about how Ramus moved *inventio* and *dispositio* out of the procedures of rhetoric into those of dialectic. This meant that judgement of how facts were to be put: *dispositio* now became an abstract logical process rather than an admittedly fallible but many-faceted and highly regarded human argumentative process. Similarly actual, concrete, uninvented *facts* had to be *found* instead of discursively created (*inventio*). Abstract, detached, notionally *scientific* procedure was privileged over the more discursive as the producer of inter and intra human depictions of reality. At the same time the essential human characteristic of remembering, which is an omnipresent dimension of the ways we think and fail to think every day, was forgotten and largely remains forgotten. It was subsumed by privileging written and other forms of recording which now largely stand in for human memory. The Enlightenment saw the vast expansion of vernacular and scholarly scientific writing. This startling revolution in communication technology was allowed to overwhelm the importance of the ways humans organically record and organically forget. Ong⁷ remarks on the downgrading of this element of rhetoric which involves a failure to acknowledge that the mind does not operate like a congealed text. The implication again is that scientific, or as critiques might call them: *scientistic* advances have made redundant or superseded traditional, human discursive practices. The downgrading of *memoria* is perhaps one of the least understood and most important aspects of the dismantling of rhetoric. Its removal from the field of discussion obscures the point that whatever the external-to-the-mind recording of facts, the mind's comprehension of all facts remains an active organic process of decay, rejuvenation, conjugation and evolution on a second-by-second and year-by-year basis. The disappearance of *memoria* detracts from and tends to make two-dimensional philosophical discussion about those *affect* and sentiment-related notions:

⁶ Aristotle, and Hugh Lawson-Tancred, *The Art of Rhetoric*, London: Penguin Books, 1991, p. 66.

⁷ Ong, Walter J., *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London ; New York: Routledge, 2002.

the *will* and *habit* – including *habitus*. These formerly discursive, pliable, tangible human qualities become reified into the solid characteristics of cold hard yet abstract facts. Will and habit become frozen artefacts which lose the constantly morphological nature previously allowed by a more human understanding of memory's constant forgetting and constant reconceptualisation.

Ong explains that Ramus and his tradition collapsed rhetoric into *elocutio* (style) and *pronuntiatio* (performance) only. These are epiphenomena which rely on *inventio* and *dispositio* for their substance. This is the usually dismissed and often despised or ridiculed style and performance... the 'spin', which is contrasted to the dialectical facts of the case. Rhetoric in this sense loses its status as the practice and the field of study which enables and critiques the advocacy of the best case for how the facts could be perceived. Full consciousness about how facts are conceived and applied is set aside. Instead there is a naivety, a mesmerised wonderment about the marvellous 'facts' themselves... facticity *per se*.

With the refusal to concede that perceptions of our world are always, and always quite rightly delivered via a mixture of persuasion and emotion as well as 'facts' we become the products of a culture where truth must always be an ideoscopic product. That is truth can only be accredited by specially equipped scientific and social scientific experts. Cenoscopically arrived at truth, that is 'facts' weight up in and balanced by discourses involving *affect* become less believable⁸. It is this eviscerated, impotent version of rhetoric which sits scorned in the back seat while sure factual science drives a world which is an antonym of egalitarianism towards its non-environmental future. We are all passengers of this current one-dimensional version of rhetoric. This is a version in which facts are presented superficially with a gloss – a 'spin' which is far removed from responsibility for the logic – the reality of what these facts actually portend. Some of the most important authorities for what is being claimed about rhetoric in this article include the below⁹. However glimpses of the remains of the pillaging of rhetoric can be seen out of the corner of the eye as it were in 19th and 20th century authorities of the post-modern. For instance Nietzsche's *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language*; Eagleton's 'A small history of rhetoric'; Barthe's 'The Old Rhetoric: an aide memoire' as well as in Derrida's occasional references to rhetoric¹⁰. These are all postmodern writers, or in Nietzsche's case a forerunner of the postmodern, who seem to be involved in some sort of intellectual immune response to the pathogenic effect of the Ramist legacy.

⁸ See Deely and Peirce below.

⁹ Bizzell and Herzberg 2001, Herrick, 2005, Jarratt, 1991, Ong, 1982, Ong, 2004, Perelman, 1982, Perelman, 1969, Skinner, 1996.

¹⁰ Nietzsche, 1989, Barthes, 1994, Eagleton, 1981, Derrida, 1991.

IDEOSCOPY AND CENOSCOPY

The Enlightenment denaturing of rhetoric can be argued to be synonymous with what Deely following Peirce charts as the rise of ideoscopy and the decline of cenoscopy. These terms mean respectively: knowledge originated in special scientific ways which it is hard to understand if you are not a relevant specialist like a mathematician or somebody equipped with a microscope; as against metaphysically originated knowledge worked out by people applying logic in a common-sense manner to experience using extant discourse:

Every department of idioscopy is based upon special observation and only resorts to philosophy in order that certain obstacles to its pursuing its special observational inquiries may be cleared out of the way... Class II is philosophy, which deals with positive truth, indeed, yet contents itself with observations such as come within the range of every man's normal experience, and for the most part in every waking hour of his life. Hence Bentham calls this class cœnoscopic. These observations escape the untrained eye precisely because they permeate our whole lives¹¹.

Taking up these terms from Bentham and Peirce, Deely writes:

One way of understanding that historical period or epoch in European history called 'The Enlightenment' is precisely as that period when ideoscopy began to take hold and demand institutionalisation within the framework of the developing 'community of inquirers' inspired by the idea of the university... The exuberance of the early generation of inquirers who turned to ideoscopy, especially in the mathematisation of the results of experimentation and observation acquired by the systematic use of instruments which extended the unaided sense powers of the human body, led to a naive but general expectation that ideoscopy, the development of science in the definitively modern sense, would 'slow by slow' supplant cenoscopy entirely¹².

This changing of the guard from cenoscopy to ideoscopy and the Ramist dismantling of the status of rhetoric is in line with commentaries by modern scholars of rhetoric such as James Herrick and Susan Jarratt:

Vico wrote passionately in response to the great philosopher and mathematician Rene Descartes, who despised rhetoric and wished to relegate it to an obscure place in the academy... Vico argued that the mathematical proofs of Descartes were just as reliant on symbols as were the orations of the rhetoricians... Nevertheless the idea that science would provide a rational basis for future

¹¹ Charles Sanders Peirce, *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, New York: Dover Publications, 1955, pp. 66-70.

¹² John Deely, *Augustine and Peirce: The Protosemiotic Development*, Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2009, p. 4.

societies was gaining influence and Vico sought to answer what he viewed as a dangerous cultural development¹³.

And:

Though it is impossible to generalise about discourse in all the centuries since the sophists, it can be said that the suppression of difference crucial to the operation of philosophy has often relegated the heterogeneity of sophistic discourse to the margins of the serious public work of knowledge formation and communication... This exclusion of sophistic rhetoric might be traced in the Christian search for God's truth or in the medieval emphasis on dialectic over "grammar" (i.e. poetics) and rhetoric in the trivium. The most powerful operation of this suppression, still operative today, comes with the relegation of rhetoric by seventeenth century science to external "color" or supplemental "dress" – meaning distorting obfuscation.¹⁴

THE DIALECTIC OF ENLIGHTENMENT

We will now turn to another critique of Enlightenment rationality which on the face of it does not appear to be directly related to rhetoric. But later we will so relate it through the concept of morality. Horkheimer and Adorno's *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* counsels caution about too enthusiastic an embrace of what we currently take to be our everyday reality. The authors fled Nazi Germany to the United States to write this deep philosophical analysis which was provoked by the horror of that period. It is a book about disillusionment with the original promise of scientifically enlightened ideas. The book essentially says that since Western culture began, organised human-kind, instead of being interested in properly understanding society and nature, has always been more intent on controlling and exploiting people and nature. The pair's despair at this folly was obviously accentuated by the terrible ways that the Nazis exploited the scientific and social administrative benefits of Enlightenment thought. But in a later edition they go on to condemn the post war consumer society and if they were alive today surely they would point to the technical exploitation and seemingly deliberate misunderstandings of nature which have led to the present environmental crisis. They quote Francis Bacon to argue that:

For Bacon as for Luther, "knowledge that tendeth but to satisfaction, is but as a courtesan, which is for pleasure, and not for fruit or generation." Its concern is not "satisfaction, which men call truth," but "operation," the effective

¹³James Herrick, *The History and Theory of Rhetoric: An Introduction*, Boston: Allyn and Beacon, 2005, p. 176.

¹⁴Susan Jarratt, *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991, p. 66.

procedure... For enlightenment, anything which does not conform to the standard of calculability and utility must be viewed with suspicion.¹⁵

But for Horkheimer and Adorno this colonisation or incorporation of more effective thinking for self-interested purposes did not start with the last Enlightenment. They say the same thing happened in the first enlightenment – the Ancient Greek Enlightenment. For them Homeric use of myth was already enlightened. It was clearly enlightened because these early sagas already used myth in a way which acknowledged myth as *myth* i.e. as fairy tale. But this enlightened, self-reflective use of myth was put to use to depict and surreptitiously accredit a bourgeois political and economic system. In other words archaic myth used in an overtly enlightened manner was recruited to create a further but unacknowledged, covert myth about the nobility of the upper classes. For instance in the story of Odysseus overt, archaic myth is not used simply as metaphor or narrative vehicle in order to illustrate the nature and geography of the Aegean or the psychology of its inhabitants. Instead it is additionally recruited to insinuate social-ideological notions. We are delivered an unacknowledged second level myth which is a morality tale about the bourgeoisie. This is a myth which helps to create and accredit the noble classes as hero:

The seafarer Odysseus outwits the natural deities as the civilised traveller was later to swindle savages, offering them coloured beads for ivory... Odysseus's athletic accomplishments are those of the gentleman who, free of practical cares, can train himself in lordly self-mastery ... Odysseus inflicts on the stay-at-homes symbolically what organized landowning has long since done to them in reality, and legitimizes himself as a nobleman.¹⁶

Horkheimer and Adorno argue that from slave owning societies through to scientific societies dominant enlightenment thinking, that is rational thinking, has always prioritised the maintenance of power over people and over nature. Knowledge for its own sake has always come second. They enlist Nietzsche in this argument:

Like few others since Hegel, Nietzsche recognized the dialectic of enlightenment. He formulated the ambivalent relationship of enlightenment to power. Enlightenment must be "drummed into the people, so that the priests all turn into priests with a bad conscience-and likewise with the state. That is the task of enlightenment: to show up the pompous behaviour of princes and statesmen as a deliberate lie." However, enlightenment had always been a means employed by the "great artists of government (Confucius in China, the

¹⁵ Quoted in Horkheimer and Adorno 2002 from Bacon, Francis, 'The interpretation of nature' *The works of Francis Bacon*, 1776, p. 375.

¹⁶ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Gunzelin Schmid Noerr ed., Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2002, pp. 39-44.

Roman Empire, Napoleon, the Papacy, when it was concerned with power and not just with the world) ... The self-deception of the masses in this respect -- for instance, in all democracies -- is highly advantageous: making people small and governable is hailed as 'progress'!"¹⁷

This thesis counsels caution when considering post-Enlightenment reason. Horkheimer and Adorno suggest rationality is rife with pragmatic and utilitarian assumptions about what the world is, how the world works and how the world should work. Sometimes thought is employed ethically; sometimes it is employed in a Machiavellian manner. Rarely is thought allowed to range freely for the sake of thought as such. It is usually put to a political-technological purpose. It is nearly always under the control of some particular motive, some particular power, some particular interest. These are motives, powers, and interests which may be blinkered in terms of environmental or humane good sense. According to this thesis this is the way the world is in the minds of many if not most of us. In further exploring this enlightenment pessimism and its implications for rhetoric it is perhaps instructive to compare Horkheimer and Adorno's views to those of their later [Institute for Social Research](#) at the [University of Frankfurt am Main](#) colleague Jürgen Habermas. In particular we will look at Habermas's concept of the public sphere. For those with awareness about the history of rhetoric an examination of what Habermas means by 'the public sphere' would seem to open up many possibilities. However, reading Habermas's 'public sphere' from the rhetorical perspective throws up a number of surprises.

RATIONALISM VERSUS RHETORIC IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

First a word of explanation: The term 'public sphere' is familiar to scholars of communication. It was conceived by 1960s translators in an attempt to capture German communication theorist Jürgen Habermas's use of the word 'öffentlichkeit'.¹⁸ In his 'Translator's Note' to Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*,¹⁹ Thomas Burger agrees with Kleinsteuber's translation. Burger writes: 'Offentlichkeit...may be rendered variously as "the public;" "public sphere;" or "publicity,"' The term öffentlichkeit/public sphere appears in many of Habermas's

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁸ Hans Kleinsteuber, 'Habermas and the Public Sphere: From a German to European Perspective', *Javnost*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2001.

¹⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1989, p. xv.

writings, for instance: *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*²⁰, and *The Theory of Communicative Action*.²¹ Subsequently the term ‘public sphere’ has been widely adopted in English. Kleinsteuber suggests *öffentlichkeit* is best understood as ‘openness’ in the sense of ‘public-ness’ as opposed to secrecy. In this sense one would expect a flourishing democracy to have a healthy ‘public sphere’: That is a political and cultural climate conducive to everyone having good access to accurate, candid information about social and political factors and decision making. A healthy public sphere would also imply that everyone’s opinions about important matters was being listened to, respected and that ordinary people were able to participate in important decision making in society. A pathological public sphere would have the opposite qualities.

In the context of a discussion of rhetoric, when considering Habermas and his notion of the ‘public sphere’ it is useful to realise that despite the ‘dialectical’ wariness of his two above predecessors Habermas is less suspicious of Ramus-affected modern rationality:

Just as in Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the Enlightenment critique of myth turned into another myth, so here the principle of the bourgeois public sphere, the critical assessment of public policy in rational discussion, oriented to a concept of the public interest, turns into what Habermas calls a manipulated public sphere in which states and corporations use “publicity” in the modern sense of the word to secure for themselves a kind of plebiscitary acclamation. Habermas’s analysis however is both more carefully grounded in the results of historical, sociological and political scientific research, and somewhat less pessimistic in its conclusions.²²

The second part of the above passage implies that for Habermas rational thinking, that is post-Enlightenment thinking is not beyond redemption in the way that Horkheimer and Adorno suggest it is. For Habermas Enlightenment-informed social science *can* serve the wider public interest. Rationalism is *not* forever tainted with instrumental purposes which bar it from ever really approaching the truth. Habermas’s post-Ramus, anti-rhetoric faith in Enlightenment logic is underlined by his attack on the alleged post-modern reincarnation of rhetoric in the literary theory of Derrida:

²⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry Into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992.

²¹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1984.

²² William Outhwaite in *The Habermas Reader*, ed. William Outhwaite, Cambridge, Eng: Polity Press, 1996, p. 8.

If, following Derrida's recommendation, philosophical thinking were to be relieved of the duty of solving problems and shifted over to the problem of literary criticism, it would be robbed, not merely of its seriousness, but of its productivity... Whoever transposes the radical critique of reason into the domain of rhetoric in order to blunt the paradox of self-referentiality, also dulls the sword of the critique of reason itself.²³

Passages like the above show that Habermas sees it as too defeatist to argue, as Vico might²⁴ that our world outlooks are under the control of the makers of myth, the exponents of epideictic, or the silky tongued practitioners of public affairs. Habermas is wedded to reasoning and logic in a way which puts him at odds with contemporary literary and rhetorical theorists. He argues that society can only be put into contact with truth rationally if media workers are allowed professional autonomy. In an article about lobbyists; advocates; 'experts' (e.g. think tank researchers); moral entrepreneurs (good cause campaigners); and intellectuals he suggests:

There are two types of actors without whom no political public sphere could be put to work: professionals of the media system—especially journalists who edit news, reports, and commentaries—and politicians who occupy the centre of the political system and are both the co-authors and addressees of public opinions. Mediated political communication is carried on by an elite. We can distinguish five more types among the actors who make their appearance on the virtual stage of an established public sphere: (a) lobbyists who represent special interest groups; (b) advocates who either represent general interest groups or substitute for a lack of representation of marginalized groups that are unable to voice their interests effectively; (c) experts who are credited with professional or scientific knowledge in some specialized area and are invited to give advice [think tanks]; (d) moral entrepreneurs who generate public attention for supposedly neglected issues [the Oxfams, the World Visions etc.]; and, last but not least, (e) intellectuals who have gained, unlike advocates or moral entrepreneurs, a perceived personal reputation in some field (e.g., as writers or academics) who engage, unlike experts and lobbyists, spontaneously in public discourse with the declared intention of promoting general interests [public intellectuals].²⁵

23 Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990, p. 210.

24 Giambattista Vico and Leon Pompa, *The First New Science*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

25 Jürgen Habermas, 'Political Communication in Media Society: Does Democracy Still Enjoy an Epistemic Dimension? The Impact of Normative Theory on Empirical Research', *Communication Theory*, vol. 16, no. 4, 2006, pp. 411-426.

For all the authorities quoted in the first sections of this paper the roles (a) to (e) are clearly those of rhetoricians. However, Habermas ignores the notion of rhetoric and continues on a clearly Post-Enlightenment rationalist track:

...political communication in the public sphere can facilitate deliberative legitimization processes in complex societies only if a self-regulating media system gains independence from its social environments and if anonymous audiences grant a feedback between an informed elite discourse and a responsive civil society.²⁶

And:

As an essential element of the democratic process, deliberation is expected to fulfil three functions: to mobilize and pool relevant issues and required information, and to specify interpretations; to process such contributions discursively by means of proper arguments for and against; and to generate rationally motivated yes and no attitudes that are expected to determine the outcome of procedurally correct decisions.²⁷

So for Habermas in public affairs, 'truth' has to be obtained through: 'proper arguments' by 'detached' 'anonymous' people who 'generate rationally motivated yes and no attitudes'. This all sounds a bit like the logical operations of a computer. It is to do with detached discourse, discourse which is not tainted by human feelings generated from involvement in what is being referred to. Peter Ramus would have approved.

The difference between a rhetorical approach and the view which Habermas takes about how the public sphere should operate comes down to this: The rhetorical approach suggests that people involved in public affairs, not people involved in, not detached from, have a responsibility to constantly orient themselves in terms of the morality involved in receiving, developing and passing on rhetoric. People who influence thinking, and that means all of us, have to take individual responsibility for being human 'makers of reality'. This is the responsibility which falls like it or not on all citizens living in any democracy which claims descent from Athens. As David Held writes:

Athenian democracy was marked by a general commitment to the principle of civic virtue: dedication to the republican city state and the subordination of private life to public affairs and the common good.²⁸

²⁶ Ibid., p. 411.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 416.

²⁸ David Held, *Models of Democracy*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006, p. 14.

But ‘dedication to the republican city state’ then as now requires ethical involvement in the political discourse and political decision making of that state and consequently involvement in developing and passing on ideas, or in a word: ‘rhetoric’. This was the credo of the Periclean Funeral Speech about Athenian democracy as crafted by Thucydides (circa 460-395 BCE) who wrote:

Here [Athens] each individual is interested not only in his own affairs but in the affairs of the state as well...we do not say that a man who takes no interest in politics is a man who minds his own business; we say that he has no business here at all. We Athenians in our own persons, take our decisions on policy or submit them to proper discussion; for we do not think that there is an incompatibility between words and deeds; the worst thing is to rush into action before the consequences have been properly debated.²⁹

Note in the above the acknowledgement of the power of ‘words’ and the need to ‘debate’ and ‘discuss’ rather than to deduce using some kind of detached pure logic. The implication is that all citizens in what is claimed to be a democracy have to realise that they have a responsibility to be ethical discussants. Everyone is charged with the responsibility of producing culture – that is ideas which lead to social forms – in ways which are fair and humane and which steer away from nihilistic tendencies. Habermas by contrast argues for the professional class to be organised rationally. Society should be engineered such that, for instance, communication professionals are made autonomous, that is not beholden to any special interests. This autonomy would somehow produce upright professionals who Rousseau-like, or Kant-like would then clearly know what is the right thing to do by some transcendental realisation. But if we compare this Habermasian view to that of Horkheimer and Adorno we can see that the latter might deny this optimism. Horkheimer and Adorno hold that knowledge always has a tendency to be initiated by passions for self-interest. Consequently, however liberated and independent, how can we guarantee that professional communicators will not indulge in the self-interest warned about by the two Frankfurt School pessimists? It is as if Habermas believes that freedom somehow leads automatically to pure minds and a sort of pure rationality which in turn will bring about pure understanding. The position of this paper by contrast is that what is needed is the millennia-old notion of ethically policed rhetoric. In the absence of ethically policed rhetoric Habermas offers the concept of ‘deliberative legitimation’. That is he prioritises external rules on discourse rather than dealing with the internal morality of the discussants. He prefers to advocate an external quasi-judicial institution rather than an internal mental-moral-conscience centred institution. This

²⁹ Cited from *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, Ibid., p. 14.

hygienic sidelining of the ‘personal-ethical’ indicates a rejection of the organic-rhetorical approach to democratic discourse in favour of an artificial scientism of this difficult area. A central weakness in Habermas’s argument is that whatever the mechanism of ‘deliberative legitimation’ there actually needs to be really informed and ethical professionals in the categories (a) to (e) above who will act properly in order to take advantage of the special immunities and authorisations that are bestowed upon them. If there are not Habermas’s schema fails. In other words Habermas’s schema provides the external conditions for autonomous professionals. But it relies on finding recruits who are suitably educated, sufficiently honest and who possess sage wisdom. This means either the new social structure will cause such paragons to magically appear, or a hunt would need to be launched. The recruitment effort will be to find people with suitable, internalised intellectual and moral qualities. Without such erudite and ethical people, the above discussed ‘deliberative legitimation’ or ‘elite discourse’ become empty ideas. So in other words Habermas focuses on the *structure* and *form* of an imaginary political environment which might produce an egalitarian public sphere of discourse. Rhetoric on the other hand is more concerned with the moral quality of communicators themselves – i.e. all of us. In contrast to this approach to reasoning rhetoric emphasises the need for the types of people who we are internally. It is individual internal morality which determines the quality of a democracy and its public sphere. Abstract social forms dreamed up via some putative rational process have less efficacy in this respect.

RHETORIC AND ETHICS VERSUS RATIONALITY AND ETHICS

Alasdair MacIntyre has a rather critical view of the way many putatively rational thinkers approach ethics:

The most striking feature of contemporary moral utterance is that so much of it is used to express disagreements; and the most striking feature of the debates in which those disagreements are expressed is their interminable character... There seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture.³⁰

This is written in the third edition of MacIntyre’s *After Virtue* which is famous for giving up on much Enlightenment philosophy of ethics and instead, almost in exasperation, reaching back to Aristotelian principles of civic virtue. Ethics is a big subject in philosophy where it is reasoned about under such rationalist notions as deontology, consequentialism, utilitarianism and teleology. But surely in practical terms ultimately some person-in-the-street notion of ethicality has to be resorted to?

³⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007, p. 6.

Practical democracy after all is the province and the responsibility of people in general who all live their lives and make every-day decisions far removed from the realm of philosophers. A turn to a proper understanding of the notion of rhetoric can help with this conundrum. This is because the issue of ethics has always been inseparable from rhetoric and vice-versa.

Unlike today, dialectic, grammar and rhetoric used to be all of a piece with morality. The moral nature of rhetoric is particularly underlined by St Augustine of Hippo (354-430) who was a professor of rhetoric as well as a main pillar of Western Christianity³¹. The example of Augustine underlines the point that for many centuries truth as perceived by the church was sacred. I.e. the 'Word' was tied to particular ethical conventions. But the inseparability of rhetoric from moral practice goes back much further than that. Two and a half millennia ago Isocrates (BCE 436–338) a famed rhetorician contemporary of Plato wrote:

...there is no institution devised by man which the power of speech has not helped us to establish. For this it is which has laid down laws concerning things just and unjust and things base and honourable; and if it were not for these ordinances we should not be able to live with one another. It is by this also that we confute the bad and extol the good.³²

Isocrates' wisdom is reflected down the centuries in the words of other famous rhetoricians such as Cicero (BCE 106–43) and Quintilian (ca. 35–96). Cicero's argument for the necessity of morality in public affairs is implicit and often explicit throughout his writing, for instance in *On Duties* III:

...for one man to take something from another and to increase his own advantage at the cost of another's disadvantage is more contrary to nature than death, than poverty, than pain and than anything else that may happen to his body or external possessions. In the first place it destroys the common life and the fellowship of men: ... the thing that is most of all in accordance with nature will be shattered, that is the fellowship of the human race.³³

The link between sound morals and oratory – a major vehicle of rhetoric is remarked by Quintilian:

...he who would answer my idea of an orator must be a good man...no man, unless he be good, can ever be an orator... It is of importance that an orator

³¹ Augustine, *The Confessions; The City of God; On Christian Doctrine*, Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952.

³² *Isocrates*, trans. George Norlin and Larue Van Hook, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1928, p. 6-7.

³³ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *On Duties*, trans. Miriam Griffin and E. M. Atkins, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 108.

should be good because, should the power of speaking be to support an evil, nothing would be more pernicious than eloquence alike to public concerns and private, and I myself, who as far as it is in my power, strive to contribute something to the faculty of the orator, should deserve very ill of the world, since I would furnish arms not for soldiers, but for robbers.³⁴

Aristotle, another scholar of rhetoric, also wrote the *Nicomachean Ethics*. *And as we have seen* he codified rhetoric as requiring the elements of ethos, logos and pathos - character, logic and emotion. In other words we are not persuaded by people if they have poor character even if they speak with the utmost rationality and instil deep emotion in us. Morality is intrinsic to how communication helps us to form our thought.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued for the restoration of the prestige and understanding of the millennia-old art of rhetoric. It has explained its dismantling by Enlightenment ideas and the critique and contradictions which this eclipse has led to. This is all that this paper has had the space to explain. What needs to be started in another paper is a mapping of the intellectual travesty and political-social disaster which has resulted. Nobody wants to re-ignite the morality of the slave-owning society of the Ancient Greeks or the ridiculous waffle of the religious. But that is not the point. What insight into the long existence of the post-Enlightenment decline of rhetoric gives us is a hint about rhetoric's importance. This is a hint about how dangerous has been the decoupling of persuasive discourse and moral schema from dialectic. Discourse: the codes by which people think – is all that differentiates civilisation from animal existence. The ideas in people's heads are what humanity is. But it is a massive mistake to attribute the ideas in people's heads to logical processes alone. As the ancients knew, but apparently the moderns do not, thinking is a product of dialectic *and* its counterpart: rhetoric. Persuasive communication is as fundamental to civilisation as is logic. But clearly if that is the case, civilisation can be stamped out if persuasive communication is not under the control of, or guided by, suitable morality. One does not have to make an argument here for draconian censorship and control of the media. But one *does* have to say that every utterance everywhere in every media; media ranging from the global commercial to neighbourhood gossip, has to be taken

³⁴ Quintilian, 'Institutes of Oratory', trans. R. J. S. Watson, in Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg eds., *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, Boston: Bedford St Martin's, 2001, p. 413.

far more seriously than it presently is. The above rhetorical roles (a) to (e) ironically not named as such by Habermas need to be far better understood and taken far more seriously. There needs to be far more transparency about the individuals who play these roles, particularly if their interventions are especially powerful. These people's qualifications need to be far more transparent in terms of their morality, their education, their financial and other personal interests, their benevolent or evil track record. In the distant past many of the most important rhetoricians were ordained as priests. Others were celebrated as leading statesmen and outstanding humanists. In those eras the identity, character and status of the far fewer people who significantly shaped thought were clear. By contrast today thought is perhaps most powerfully influenced by matrices of maybe hundreds of thousands of unknown men and women who live unremarkable, invisible lives as communication workers of one sort or another. They work in the quasi professions listed near the start of this paper: '*specialists in: psychology...event management and so on*'. These knowledge workers, albeit unconsciously, subscribe to a post-Enlightenment ideology which marginalises the status of their work. They are not helped in this sleepwalking by a deficient 'rationalist' academia which is ill-equipped to challenge their lack of awareness. Neither the practitioners nor the more culpable academics sufficiently recognise the civilisation-affecting consequences of the persuasive communication work being carried out. This 'professional' work is 'accredited' by ethical codes aligned to the pathological assumptions of Ramus and to varieties of the subsequent post-Enlightenment rationalist strains of thought. Like an iceberg, only one fifth of the products of this knowledge industry is visible. It is most visible in the cultural outcomes manifest in celebrity showbiz including celebrity academia and the woefully unintelligent popular politics, popular economics and other aspects of popular culture which we all have to suffer. It is time that intellectuals woke up to this industrial scale *amoralising* of contemporary putatively 'civilised' thought. The slumber which needs to be shaken off is not the slumber of somebody who has not caught a better idea emerging from the Enlightenment. It is the slumber of, the forgetting of, what happened to thought during the Enlightenment, or for Horkheimer and Adorno – of what happens to thought in any enlightenment.

Clearly, with modern technology there are now billions of people capable of becoming right thinking rhetoricians in comparison to the few thousands who filled this niche in centuries past. However in centuries past only a few thousands went to universities or their equivalent. Today hundreds of millions go to universities. The forgotten central role of these universities is explained in this paper. It is the central role of questioning thinking in a way which can evolve the capacity to understand.

Rhetoricians understand how people understand and they use that knowledge to orient other's understandings for the better or for the worse. Consequently we should join with Hobbes who urges us to understand rhetoric so that we reduce the ways it can be used for evil.

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